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28/02/07

A Strategy for Scotland's Languages  
Scottish Executive Education Department  
Cultural Policy Division  
Area 1-A North  
Victoria Quay  
Edinburgh  
EH6 6QQ

Dear Sirs

I write on behalf of the Association for Scottish Literary Studies. The Association welcomes the clear statement of guiding principles for language provision set out in the draft document *A Strategy for Scotland's Languages*. It strongly endorses the reasons given for promoting the development of Scotland's languages: to celebrate cultural diversity, to promote respect and confidence, to encourage economic activity and to enrich education.

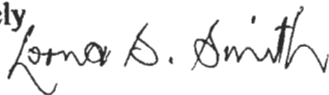
The Association welcomes in particular the document's support for Scots and Gaelic. It is especially encouraged by the recognition of Scots as a language and the endorsement of its positive role in the school curriculum. The Association hopes that there will be articulation with *A Curriculum for Excellence* to enable the promotion of Scots within the curriculum.

The Association feels it can make a valuable contribution to this strategy by continuing to promote and develop its teaching materials, literary and linguistic resources, CPD courses, education conferences and teaching expertise.

I enclose three documents which set out the Association's key educational principles and policy which we hope will be a useful contribution this consultation.

Yours sincerely,

Lorna Smith  
Secretary



## **Association for Scottish Literary Studies**

### **CULTURE STRATEGY AND A CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE**

*The ASLS offers the following key points as the basis for the Association's education policy.*

**1** The achievements of Scotland's culture are distinctive, rich and of the highest quality and like all civilised countries the nation has a responsibility to sustain and promote these assets through its education system.

**2** National educational guidance should ensure that experience of Scottish culture is a continuous entitlement for all learners from 3-18 and this responsibility should range over all 8 domains identified in the Curriculum for Excellence (CFE).

**3** In the area described as "English Language" explicit, systematic provision should be made for the Scottish dimensions of literature and language.

**4** Planning of the Language curriculum should observe at all stages the general pedagogic principle that learning starts from the familiar and local, and moves outward from there. As a consequence Scottish components should be at the core of the curriculum not the periphery.

**5** When CFE comes to chart its clear statements of "English Language" outcomes for young people and their related measures of national attainment, the relevant Scottish components should be included in this specification.

## Why the Scots language should be at the heart of the Curriculum for Excellence

Scots is the language of lowland Scotland, the Orkney and Shetland Islands and parts of Northern Ireland. It is characterised by a distinctive vocabulary and grammar, and associated with a range of geographical and social accents. Its origins lie in the unique historical mixture of Old English, Old Norse, Latin, French, Dutch and Gaelic that was spoken by settlers and immigrants in lowland Scotland and the Northern Isles. It is a sister language to English – whose Germanic roots it shares – and it also has close affinities with Scandinavian languages like Norwegian and Danish.

Scots is still a widely spoken medium in Scotland. It ranges from Broad Scots, which is still used in some communities in both formal and informal situations, to a Scottish-English hybrid variety, which since the 18<sup>th</sup> century has been adopted by many Scots, particularly in formal situations.

Scots is also an important written medium. Its literature dates from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and Scots has been used by writers of global importance – Barbour, Henryson, Dunbar, Montgomerie, Burns, Scott, Galt, Stevenson, MacDiarmid, to name only a few. While the last 300 years have seen written Scots reserved largely for literary expression, that tradition remains lively and appreciated – as is witnessed by the high level of demand for well-written, contemporary fiction in Scots, such as Matthew Fitt's recent best-selling translation of Roald Dahl's *The Twits* as *The Eejits*.

It is imperative that pupils in Scottish schools learn to value, understand and use spoken and written Scots for strong pedagogical reasons that are integral to the four capacities (alluded to below in **bold**):

- The Scots language exerts a considerable influence on everyday speech in Scotland, whether speakers normally use Broad Scots or Scottish English. An informed and sympathetic understanding of how Scottish speakers have come to speak the way they do will bolster pupils' **self confidence** and thus lead them to becoming more **successful learners** and communicators.
- An understanding of the variety of regional, social and ethnic language forms that characterise Scottish speakers should promote both a sense of self-recognition as a speech community, and so social inclusion, as well as an understanding of the historical relationships that link today's Scots speakers with speakers of kindred languages. Pupils thus will become more **responsible citizens**, both nationally and globally.
- An appreciation of the written forms of Scots, historical and contemporary, should promote an appreciation of the distinctive history of literature in Scotland, and its function in celebrating and negotiating the values of the community. They will become more **effective contributors** to society.

Primary resources now exist to kindle an understanding of the historical formation and contemporary relevance of the Scots language and its literature, including reputable dictionaries, reference books, and, increasingly, digitised on-line archives of Scottish speech and writing. Teachers and pupils now require:

- The incentive to put Scots at the heart of a languages curriculum
- Guidance on how to exploit the wealth of raw material at our disposal.

## WHY SCOTTISH LITERATURE SHOULD BE AT THE HEART OF OUR SCHOOLS CURRICULUM

*Scottish Literature should be at the heart of the Curriculum for Excellence. It is the most powerful means of building the capacities on which the curriculum is founded.*

The range of Scottish Literature should never be underestimated. Scottish Literature is one of the oldest vernacular literatures in Europe, predominantly written in three languages: Gaelic, Scots and English, but with work in Latin and contemporary community languages as well. The main literary genres of poetry, fiction and drama are fully represented and the main language traditions are all accessible to English-language readers either directly or in translation.

**Authors** Essential canonical writers of Scottish literature may be sampled in the following list. These are authors every student of the subject should be familiar with to some degree: John Barbour, Blind Harry, Robert Henryson, William Dunbar, David Lyndsay, Thomas Urquhart, the (anonymous) Ballads, James Boswell, Tobias Smollett, Duncan Ban MacIntyre, Alasdair MacMaster Alasdair, Allan Ramsay, Robert Fergusson, Burns, Jean Elliott, Byron, Scott, Hogg, Galt, Carlyle, James ('B.V.') Thomson, John Davidson, R.L. Stevenson, George Macdonald, Norman Douglas, George Douglas Brown, David Lindsay, Edwin Muir, Hugh MacDiarmid, Norman MacCaig, Sorley MacLean, Edwin Morgan, Liz Lochhead.

The study of Scottish Literature addresses all four capacities:

1. Success in learning

An indicator of success in learning is manifest in a developing understanding that the literatures of Scotland form a coherent tradition of contemporary relevance.

2. Confidence as individuals

Self-confidence is to some extent a result of knowing that you are part of a culture of global significance.

3. Social responsibility

Literature in general is a forum for the exploration of social values. Scottish literature is the natural medium for the exploration of these values as they pertain to Scotland.

4. Effectiveness as contributors

The study of Scottish Literature promotes the following skills and competences that are essential for contributors to society:

- critical analysis
- logical reasoning
- articulate verbal argument
- committed intellectual engagement
- clear, direct writing
- understanding of subtlety and nuance
- sustaining an openness to alternative ways of reasoning
- judgemental decisiveness
- resistance to the vanity of all efforts to bind and contain imaginative life
- resistance to the mechanical excesses of systematic meaning
- the ability to think independently
- sensitivity to the layered complexity of all communication

For the above reasons we would emphasise our commitment that clear guidance should be given at all levels of the curriculum, with reference to the five essential points proposed by the ASLS.